1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

556 performance of rites of this kind. But sociological and ethical
[182] concepts, shown at their highest development in the potlatch,
are not limited to a few weeks of the year, or to any class of
the community. Generosity on a large scale can be publicly
[577] displayed by chiefs alone, but to a lesser degree this virtue
must be practised by everyone, since avarice is considered a
576 major sin. Anyone who happens to pass a house in which a
574 meal is taking place must be invited to share it; to do other-
wise would be considered rude. The person summoned must
take at least a trifle to show that he is not churlish and too
proud to eat with his host, while if he is hungry, he shares
[177] whatever is being served as a matter of course. The head of
[273] the family should be the first to taste any wine* as proof that
it is not poisoned, but otherwise he fares little, if any, better
[342] than his guests. This custom is now rapidly falling into disuse
[414] through the construction of individual family houses with doors
and locks. The fisherman who has exclusive rights to a suit-
476 able place for netting olachen or salmon must give some of his
[226] catch to anyone who asks him. If he has landed four salmon,
the first solicitor is given one, later comers, none at all. When
a net is set in the river, anyone passing is allowed to raise it
and take some of the contents; if there are two fish, he may
remove one, if many, three or four. To take all would be a
[685] despicable theft, sufficient to brand the transgressor as greedy;
[624] hence public opinion prevents the system from being carried
[224] to excess. A hunter who brings back several mountain goats
or other large game is expected to invite his neighbours to a
feast, which virtually means that he must share his takings.

556 Presents of this kind increase the prestige of the donor who
431 has thus acted in accordance with Bella Coola ethics, and are
advantageous investments since others must reciprocate. The
system is carried to such lengths that, until recent years, it
was more profitable to give away goods than to sell them. In
the case of a sale, the purchaser endeavours to give as little
as possible, whereas the recipient of a gift returns as much as

*This is a modern practice, dating from the introduction of home-brew.